

Down County Recreation Advisory Board

MINUTES – November 3, 2009

APPROVED

Location: Wisconsin Place Community Center

Members Present

Linda Berg-Cross
Bob Gans
Pattie Goldberg
Fritz Hirst
John Pechilis
Joy Shindler Rafey
Jerilyn Ray-Shelley
Michael Sandner

Staff Present

Gabe Alborno, MCRD
Mary Bradford, Parks
David Branick, MCRD
Terry Brooks, Parks
Joy Peters, MCRD

Guests

Sunny Pitcher, Potomac
Paddlesports, Inc.

Welcome

Fritz Hirst began the meeting by asking everyone to introduce themselves. He acknowledged the presence of Gabe Alborno, director of the Recreation Department, and Mary Bradford, director of Parks, and then turned the meeting over to Gabe to report on the budget situation for FY11.

Recreation Department Budget Update

Gabe Alborno clarified that although he is typically a very positive person, the budget for FY11 is full of challenges. He explained that this will be the third consecutive year of straight reductions – a staggering 24 percent cut cumulatively. He stated that although the last two years the department has been able to cut away at the edges, the FY11 reductions would necessitate a significant impact to core programs. The budget reduction requirement is 8 percent, but he has been advised to look for 10 percent reductions to offset pending State reductions. Gabe continued by saying that unfortunately these deep cuts could necessitate scaling back center hours or closing some facilities altogether. They would also affect vulnerable populations that the department has been accustomed to serving.

He mentioned that in these hard times, education, health and human services, and public safety are understandably given a higher priority. It is important that policy makers understand that Recreation is directly linked to and complements and, even at times, takes the lead in these three vital areas. He cited the following examples:

- Due to a robust after school program, crime has decreased by 9 percent in areas where they exist;
- The free Silver Sneaker program for seniors and the Therapeutic programs offered by the department have a strong impact on public health;
- The department has numerous partnerships with MCPS to support its educational endeavors.

Gabe was clear that he had come to this Board to ask for their advocacy and could help the Board with talking points on how Recreation complements the three public services areas. Fritz Hirst agreed that there was not enough public awareness of the value Recreation offers to the three public service areas, and that the Board needed to build that awareness regarding the many prevention-based programs offered by the department.

CIP Update

Gabe also gave a quick update on pending CIP projects as follows:

- Scotland's facility is on track and should be ready to accept bids by next summer.
- Clara Barton is slated to begin the design/development state in FY12.
- The Margaret Schweinhaut Senior Center is scheduled for FY13.
- The property in North Bethesda, which is across the street from the Walter Johnson High School, is still in the early planning stages, but is using the Wisconsin Place as a model. Gabe suggested a separate session on this project in the future, and stated that he would be happy to return to give a full report to the Board.

Parks Budget Update

Mary Bradford also shared budget information and stated that Parks had a different process since its budget approval comes from the County Council. She explained that Parks' main fund is tax supported, but it has more than one fund. \$80 million is tax supported to oversee 10 percent of the land in Montgomery County. In difficult financial times, Parks has some unique challenges because it cannot effectively close playgrounds or parks because they are open spaces that are readily accessible. She did say that to reduce costs by 10 percent would mean eliminating 134 positions, and the public would very definitely feel the effects of such deep cuts. Environmental issues would be significant and much more drastic than the elimination of annual plantings which occurred last year.

She shared information about Green Play, a consultant that is being hired to hold public meetings and help with strategic planning for both agencies. Both agencies are hoping this study will point the way for the next twenty years.

General Parks Update

Jeff Devlin was unable to attend tonight's meeting but sent a report, which was distributed. Mary highlighted the new Cabin John Dog Park, stating the popularity of the new facility. She also stated that there has been an increased demand to use parks for charitable causes, which is forcing Parks to look at how to generate revenue from these sorts of usages.

Proposed Public/Private Partnership

Terry Brooks, who manages the public/private partnerships for Parks, stated that Parks presently has 77 partnerships. The stables in the park system as well as the Germantown Soccerplex are examples of partnerships. He explained that at times Parks solicits partnerships and at other times, it receives unsolicited proposals. When an unsolicited proposal is received, it is put through a rigorous series of tests to see if it is financially stable, is compatible with the Parks' mission, enhances the program, and is sustainable long term.

Potomac Paddlesports, Inc. has made an unsolicited proposal, and one of the early steps is to provide information to the public for scrutiny. For this reason, Sunny Pitcher of Potomac Paddlesports, Inc. was invited to give a presentation to the Board.

Sunny Pitcher then gave a presentation, explaining that the Rockwood Manor with its 44.5 acres of land, is a perfect location for an Outdoor Center to act as a gateway to the federal park. He acknowledged that he had been approached by Dave Headrick, manager of the Great Falls Park, to promote this idea.

He stated that he is interested in serving the organic population by providing an Outdoor Center that would provide safe access to nature. With the use of a PowerPoint presentation, Sunny described his vision to provide the following:

- a unique organic restaurant
- a bicycle retail shop
- a bed and breakfast facility
- outdoor recreation programs
- a wildlife rescue /nature center
- community garden

- community nature trail system
- bunkhouse for group use

He discussed parking and traffic congestion issues, stating that he would work to proactively govern traffic levels, even to the point of providing his own transit system. His passion is to give people access to nature and thus to increase the quality of life in Montgomery County.

At the conclusion of the presentation, Fritz Hirst encouraged members to attend the November 17 public meeting on this proposal. Both Jerilyn Ray-Shelley and Joy Shindler Raffey said they would check their calendars.

Report from the Countywide Recreation Advisory Board

Jerilyn Ray-Shelley stated that she would send more information on Green Play to the Board, and she encouraged as many people who could attend, to come to the countywide meeting on January 11.

Minutes

The minutes from the June meeting were approved as read.

Wisconsin Place Community Center

David Branick welcomed the Board to the new facility and encouraged them to attend the November 15 Grand Opening. He stated that the formal program would begin at 10:00 am with class demonstrations to follow. He described the new corporate pass being offered for weight room access, and stated that already the Open Gym program is being regularly patronized by 10 to 30 people at any one time.

He then took members on a tour of the building including the full-sized gymnasium, the weight and exercise room, activity room and children's play area.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 9:50 pm. The next meeting will be on Tuesday, December 1 at the Potomac Community Center.